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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of Houghton Mifflin's Invitations to Literacy, a commercially published, integrated reading/language arts program for use in K-6 classrooms. The program provides instructional resources that seek to: build on the foundation that students bring to school and foster home-school cooperation; hold all students to the same high standards and meet students' individual needs; introduce students to a variety of high-quality literature and "real-world" resources that increase their knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of themselves, other people, and the world they live in; and respect and appreciate the diversity of each learner. Invitation to Literacy's main components include: library materials, activity books, teacher materials, program assessments, bilingual materials, parent involvement, volunteer involvement, and computerized resources. Most schools adopting Invitation to Literacy select it as the core reading program, and it is typically implemented in all regular education classes in grades K-6. The program currently (year 2000) is used in approximately 9,000 schools across the country. Sections of the paper discuss background, philosophy and goals, program components, evidence of effectiveness, professional development and support, implementation, costs, considerations, contact information, and policy issues and questions. (Contains 11 references.) (SR)

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Invitations to Literacy

**Background - Philosophy and Goals - Program Components - Evidence of Effectiveness
Professional Development and Support - Implementation - Costs - Considerations
Policy Issues and Questions - Resources**

Topic or Category: Reading
Grade Level: K-6
Target Population: General, At-Risk, Bilingual

OVERVIEW

Background and Scope:

Houghton Mifflin's Invitations to Literacy is a commercially published reading/language arts program. Development of the program was led by J. David Cooper and John J. Pikulski and based on the most current reading research. Additionally, more than 3,000 teachers in all 50 states provided feedback and input during the program's development, which took place in 1992-1994.

Invitations to Literacy is an integrated reading/language arts program designed for use in K-6 classrooms. Classroom teachers provide instruction through a variety of ways, including whole class, small groups and individuals as needed. Resource, Title I, special education, English as a Second Language and other special teachers are encouraged to work in partnership with regular classroom teachers to meet all students' needs. Volunteers can be used to support and reinforce instruction and provide practice.

The program currently is used by more than four million students in approximately 9,000 schools throughout the country. It has been publicly available since 1995.

Philosophy and Goals:

Invitations to Literacy is based on the fundamental belief that all children can and should learn to read and that teachers play a critical role in the development of students' reading and language arts skills. The program's goals are to provide instructional resources that do the following:
Build on the foundation that students bring to school and foster home-school cooperation vital to students' growing literacy.
Hold all students to the same high standards for developing reading and language arts skills and meet students' individual needs as they progress.
Introduce students to a variety of quality literature and "real-world" resources that increase their knowledge, understanding and appreciation of themselves, other people and the world in which they live.
Respect and appreciate the diversity of each learner and meet each student's needs.
Afford students the opportunity for explicit and direct instruction in comprehension; phonics and decoding; grammar, mechanics and usage; spelling; and study skills. Multiple practice options include both hands-on interactive and pencil/paper.
Use a variety of formal and informal assessment procedures to facilitate teacher instructional planning and document student progress.

Program Components:

The main features of Invitations to Literacy include the following:
Literary Materials: Authentic literature, contained in anthologies, "big books" and trade books, is

designed to motivate students, build background and concepts, and develop vocabulary and comprehension skills. Texts help students practice and apply newly learned phonics skills, practice high-frequency words, build reading fluency and provide opportunities for guided reading.
Activity Books: Literacy activity books provide written practice for comprehension, phonics/decoding, vocabulary, word study, grammar and writing skills.
Teacher Materials: Teacher's books for every grade level provide suggestions for working with the literature and include scripted, direct instruction lessons in comprehension, phonics, writing and vocabulary. Hands-on interactive lessons and practice options help teachers address individual learning styles and allow for teacher choice and creativity. Handbooks address specific issues such as assessment, professional development, home/community connections, phonics and extra support for at-risk learners.
Program Assessments: Assessments are designed to help teachers plan instruction, evaluate student progress and tailor instruction to meet student needs. Assessment tools include holistic theme-level tests, skills tests, benchmark progress tests, informal reading inventories, emergent literacy surveys and more.
Bilingual Materials: A bilingual program develops successful readers and writers in Spanish and supports the transition to English.
Parent Involvement: A parent orientation meeting acquaints parents with the school district's new reading program and provides motivation and ideas for how parents can be involved in their children's reading and writing activities. Each lesson in Invitations to Literacy includes materials that can be sent home to inform parents about their child's classroom experiences.
Volunteer Involvement: Classroom teachers are encouraged to use volunteers to support literacy efforts. Information on recruiting, training and using volunteers is included in the teacher handbook.
Computerized Resources: Houghton Mifflin's Web site provides free Internet resources for teachers, parents and students using Houghton Mifflin programs. CD-ROM products connect to classroom instruction and provide additional instruction, practice and extension opportunities.

Evidence of Effectiveness:

Summary of Evidence:
Two large-scale longitudinal investigations are under way to assess Invitations to Literacy's effectiveness. Preliminary results indicate the program is effective in significantly increasing reading and writing skills among diverse student populations.

Discussion of Evidence:
1. A five-year longitudinal study (Foorman) begun in September 1997 is examining how to prevent reading failure among students in inner-city schools. Conducted by the National Institute of Child Health and Development in cooperation with Houghton Mifflin, the study involves 1,600 children and 140 teachers in Washington, D.C., and Houston, Texas. Over the five-year period, children in kindergarten and 1st grade will be followed as they progress through 4th grade. All children are tested at the beginning and end of the year on achievement measures that include the Woodcock-Johnson reading tests, the Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement spelling test and the Gray Oral Reading Test. Six project intervention sites are using Invitations to Literacy; other sites are using another reading program. Control groups also are being used. Many of the sites for this study had a history of unacceptably low achievement when the study was initiated.

The school district's Stanford Achievement Test results provided early data for the study. In these preliminary results for schools using Invitations to Literacy, 1st graders in every school made significant gains between October and April, with the majority of 1st-grade classes scoring within the average range in reading. Some of the preliminary results include the following:
First-grade classes at one school scored at the 61st and 67th percentiles at the end of the school year in 1998; the highest-scoring class had started at the 24th percentile in 1997.
In another school, where nearly half of the 1st graders scored at "Below Basic" levels in October 1997, total reading composite for all 1st grades was at the 65th percentile by April 1998. The national average is the 50th percentile.

2. In September 1996, Houghton Mifflin began a five-year longitudinal study to evaluate Invitations to Literacy's effectiveness
(Pikulski et al.). Six schools representing the geographic and demographic diversity of American schools

were selected for inclusion. The schools, including 2,855 students in 136 K-6 classroom, agreed to use Invitations to Literacy as the core framework for their reading and language arts instruction.

During the first year of the study, analyses of both standardized and program test data indicated that Invitations to Literacy produced academic improvement for the students. A control group, composed of a nationwide, representative group of students in the same grades, were tested using the same instruments and were compared to students in the study sample. First-year findings included the following:
Kindergarten students' scores on the Houghton Mifflin Emergent Literacy Survey showed statistically significant increases across each of three areas that are highly related to success in beginning reading: phonemic awareness, familiarity with print, and beginning reading and writing.
Scores from the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test indicated that students in grades 1-6 made reading gains from 10-14 months, meeting and exceeding reading gains normally expected during a one-year period.
On the reading portion of the Houghton Mifflin Benchmark Progress Test, students' scores showed statistically significant increases across both narrative and expository reading passages and for both open-ended and multiple-choice items. The post-test results across all grades showed a 17%-27% increase in the number of students reading at or above grade level.
Scores on the writing portion of the Houghton Mifflin Benchmark Progress Test showed that, in nearly all cases, statistically significant gains were made in average writing scores. The post-test results showed that across grades 1-5, the number of students performing at the good-excellent writing competency level increased by 7%-30%.
Qualitative data gathered from questionnaires was used to evaluate how teachers, students and parents felt about the program. At the end of the first year, 89% of teachers returning questionnaires indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied with Invitations to Literacy. Eighty-seven percent of the students who responded thought their reading had improved, and 89% said they thought their writing had improved.

In year two, the total sample included 3,335 students in 217 K-6 classrooms. Four additional schools were added at the beginning of the study's second phase. Students using Invitations to Literacy continued to make statistically significant gains in reading scores.

Professional Development and Support:

Houghton Mifflin Company's educational consultants provide onsite training for schools using Invitations to Literacy. Houghton Mifflin staff work in partnership with school districts to customize inservice training and staff development plans that meet the needs of classroom teachers, building principals, special reading teachers, resource teachers and others.

The initial training, which gives an introduction to and overview of the program, can vary in length but is typically one day long. The developer strongly recommends follow-up training that takes place six to eight weeks after teachers have begun to use the program. This inservice training, which can be conducted with individual teachers or grade-level groups, provides more detailed training on the use of particular components and/or teaching strategies. Staff development workshops are available on topics including comprehension skills, reading strategies, beginning reading, phonics and decoding, flexible grouping, assessment and intervention. The developer also offers administrators an orientation that addresses their role in implementing Invitations to Literacy.

Inservice training sessions are provided for Invitations to Literacy at no charge for the life of program adoption. Many staff development services also are provided at no charge, while fees may be charged for others. Inservice and staff development plans outline any costs to the district.

Implementation:

Most districts adopting Invitations to Literacy select this program as the core reading program. The program typically is implemented in all regular education classes in grades K-6. Special education, Title I, resource rooms and other classes may implement part of or the entire program.

In addition to having strong faculty and administrative support for the program, the developer recommends that schools can strengthen implementation by:
Allocating sufficient time -- two-and-one-half-hours daily -- for reading and language arts instruction
Taking advantage of the variety of program materials to help individual students
Using the inservice and staff development training offered by the developer.

Costs:

Implementation costs for Invitations to Literacy vary by grade level and the materials selected for use. The average per-classsroom cost of materials in a new program for grades K-6 is approximately $1,700 or about $68 per student. Houghton Mifflin provides an extensive array of teacher materials at no charge to the school when Invitations to Literacy is purchased.

As noted above, inservice training on Invitations to Literacy is provided for the life of the adoption at no charge to the school district.

Considerations:

Invitations to Literacy is well-suited for schools and districts seeking a highly structured, carefully packaged reading/language arts program with strong technical and training support. While there is some room for teacher creativity in terms of selecting the most appropriate materials to use with students, the program generally does not allow for individual innovation and teacher-developed materials.

Preliminary results from the two longitudinal studies on Invitations to Literacy are positive, and anecdotal reports from school districts around the country, including Brevard County, Florida; Cleveland, Ohio; and Tacoma, Washington, show substantial gains in student achievement and satisfaction with both program materials and developer support. To date, there have been no studies published in professional journals and no independent investigations of the program.

Contact Information:
Houghton Mifflin Company
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1900 S. Batavia
Geneva, IL 60134
800.733.2828
www.hmco.com

Policy Issues and Questions:
How can states help districts and schools choose the most appropriate programs to improve students' skills and performance? What information and assistance would be useful?
Should states promote particular programs for districts and schools to use?
How can policymakers check and validate a program's track record before they encourage districts to implement the program?
What criteria should states and districts use to invest in various programs initially and for the long term?
How should policymakers weigh benefits of a program versus its costs and required resources? Can a balance be struck between effectiveness and efficiency?
What state policies can help improve teacher training and professional development so teachers are better equipped to help students learn more effectively?

Resources:
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